

MUHAMMAD THE “UMMI” MESSENGER

Peace of Allah upon him

In the name of Allah, The Most Merciful, The Most Gracious.

The word “ummi” has been translated as unlettered/ illiterate. Which means that the messenger of Allah could not read or write.

One notion which emerges from this translation is that how can those who can read and write follow someone who cannot read and write?

By the grace of Allah we shall try to see the meaning of “ummi” in perspective.

The literal meaning of “ummi” according to the Arabic dictionary Maqayees ul Lugah

الْأُمِّيّ

في اللغة المنسوبُ إلى ما عليه جيلة

الناس لا يكتُب، فهو [في] أنّه لا يكتُبُ

على ما وُلِدَ عليه

Ummi is attributed towards the original nature of mankind; he cannot write, for he cannot write in the original capacity that he was born upon.

Technical meaning of the “ummi” in the Quran.

“Ummi” used for the entire arabs.

Quran 62:2

هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُمْ يَتْلُو
عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ

وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ

مُبِينٍ

*It is He (Allah) Who has sent amongst the “ummi” nation
a messenger from among themselves, to recite to them
His Signs (verses), to purify them, and to teach them the
book and Wisdom,- although they had been, before, in
clear misguidance.*

Imam Qurtubi writes in his tafseer

قال ابن عباس: الأميُّون العرب كلهم، من
كتب منهم ومن لم يكتب، لأنهم لم يكونوا
أهل كتاب

Abdullah ibn Abbas ® said,” al-ummiyoon are all the arabs, those who could write amongst them and those who could not write because they were not the people of the book.

Allahu ta’ala named the arabs ummi because they had never received any divine books before the Quran. Even though there were few who could write they were called ummi in the Quran.

Ummi used for the messenger

Quran 7:157

الَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ الرَّسُولَ النَّبِيَّ الْأُمِّيَّ الَّذِي
يَجِدُونَهُ مَكْتُوبًا عِنْدَهُمْ فِي التَّوْرَةِ وَالْإِنْجِيلِ
يَأْمُرُهُمْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَاهُمْ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ
وَيُحِلُّ لَهُمُ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَيُحَرِّمُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْخَبَائِثَ
وَيَضَعُ عَنْهُمْ إِصْرَهُمْ وَالْأَغْلَالَ الَّتِي كَانَتْ
عَلَيْهِمْ فَاَلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِهِ وَعَزَّرُوهُ وَنَصَرُوهُ
وَاتَّبَعُوا النُّورَ الَّذِي أُنْزِلَ مَعَهُ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ
الْمُفْلِحُونَ

"Those who follow the messenger, the Ummi Prophet,

whom they find mentioned in their own (scriptures),- in

the Torah and the Gospel;- for he commands them what is good and forbids them what is evil; he makes lawful for them what is pure and prohibits them from what is impure; He releases them from their heavy burdens and from the yokes that are upon them. So it is those who believe in him, honour him, help him, and follow the light which is sent down with him,- it is they who will prosper."

Quran 29:48

وَمَا كُنْتَ تَتْلُو مِنْ قَبْلِهِ مِنْ كِتَابٍ وَلَا تَخُطُّهُ
بِیَمِينِكَ إِذَا لَارْتَابَ الْمُبْطِلُونَ

*And (O, Beloved) you never recited any book before this,
nor did you write (any book) with your own hand. (If you
had read or written) the disbelievers would certainly have
doubted.*

**What is the meaning of Ummi when used for
people?**

In the daily usage ummi is used for someone
who has not learnt to read or write therefore
he cannot read or write. The meaning

suggests that the person is not a person of knowledge because classical knowledge is gained from the medium of reading and writing.

What is the meaning of Ummi when used for the prophet?

The prophet did not learn to read or write from any human being. He did not have a human teacher for it was below the standard of the final prophet.

The prophet learnt directly from Allah and the knowledge of the prophet is nothing but a divine knowledge. This is the reason why every human is obligated to follow the prophet because no one can surpass the knowledge of the prophet.

If he had read the previous revealed books then the people would accuse him of copying the message and falsely claiming to be a prophet.

If he read any other book then the people would attribute the knowledge of the prophet to be the product of whatever he had read.

If he had written before revelation, then the people would accuse him of writing the Quran as a result of whatever he heard from the people.

Allahu ta'ala wanted to protect the prophet from all kinds of accusations so that it becomes clear that the Quran is not merely copying the previous scriptures nor is it from

any other written or prevalent knowledge which existed at that time but that Quran is the word of Allah revealed to the heart of the prophet.

Is the prophet able to read?

The Quran gives the answer in the very first verse that was revealed to the prophet.

Quran 96:1

قُرْأْ بِاِسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ

Read in the name of your Lord who created (everything).

The Quran began with the command to read and thus the prophet began to read the verses of the Quran as it was revealed to him.

It would be foolish to say that the prophet cannot read when the Quran gave the direct order to read.

It is most prudent and more suitable to say that the prophet did not read any books but he was able to read for he read the Quran – the final book of Allah.

Did the prophet write?

The prophet never wrote anything before the revelation began and he did not write even the Quran. He recited the Quran to the people and from amongst those who accepted Islam he had scribes who wrote it down on whatever was available to be written on at that time. The revelation wasn't continuous, all at once, but it was intermittent continuing for a period of 23 years.

The use of Pen

Quran 96:4

الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ

The One (Allah) who taught men by the use of the pen!

Allahu ta'ala taught men how to use the pen to write information so that it can be preserved and passed on from one person to another. It is one of the greatest blessing of Allah.

While the blessing of the pen was given to men of this world Allahu ta'ala gave the

blessing of a mightier pen to his beloved messenger, the pen of the preserved tablet so that the meaning of the verse (96:4) is more appropriately befitting the final messenger.

The knowledge of the prophet was the Quran and all that was already penned on the preserved tablet called al-Lawh al-Mahfooz.

Quran 68:1

ن وَالْقَلَمِ وَمَا يَسْطُرُونَ

Nun, By the pen and what it writes.

Quran 85:21

بَلْ هُوَ قُرْآنٌ مَّجِيدٌ

But it is the Majestic Quran.

Quran 85:22

فِي لَوْحٍ مَّحْفُوظٍ

(Written) on the preserved tablet

What is written on the Lawh-al Mahfooz?

The verse (85:22) says that the Quran is written on the preserved tablet and the

hadiths say that every detail of the creation is written on it.

Ibn Katheer writes in his tafseer under the verse 85:22

وقال الطبراني: حدثنا محمد بن عثمان بن
أبي شيبة، حدثنا منجاب بن الحارث، حدثنا
إبراهيم بن يوسف، حدثنا زياد بن عبد الله
عن ليث عن عبد الملك بن سعيد بن جبير
عن أبيه عن ابن عباس: أن رسول الله
إن الله تعالى " صلى الله عليه وسلم قال

خلق لوحاً محفوظاً من درة بيضاء،
صفحاتها من ياقوتة حمراء، قلمه نور،
وكتابه نور، لله فيه في كل يوم ستون
وثلاثمئة لحظة، يخلق ويرزق، ويميت
ويحيي، ويعز ويذل، ويفعل ما يشاء

*Ibn Abbas reports from the prophet that Allahu ta'ala
created the preserved tablet from a white pearl, it's
planks are red diamonds, it's pen is light, it's book is
light, every day Allahu ta'ala throws 360 glazes on it,
what he will create, feed, cause to die, give life, honors,
degrades and all that he wishes to do.*

What was the knowledge given to the Messenger?

Quran 4:113

وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكَ وَرَحْمَتُهُ لَهَمَّت طَّائِفَةٌ
مِّنْهُمْ أَنْ يُضِلُّوكَ وَمَا يُضِلُّونَ إِلَّا أَنْفُسَهُمْ
وَمَا يَضُرُّونَكَ مِنْ شَيْءٍ وَأَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكَ
الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَعَلَّمَكَ مَا لَمْ تَكُنْ تَعْلَمُ
وَكَانَ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكَ عَظِيمًا

*But for the Grace of Allah on you and his Mercy, a party
of them would certainly have plotted to lead you astray.
But (in fact) they will only Lead their own souls astray,*

and you they can do no harm in the least. For Allah has sent down to you the Book (Quran) and wisdom and taught you what you did not know (before): And great is the Grace of Allah upon you.

Imam Tabari in his tafseer.

وَعَلَّمَكَ مَا لَمْ تَكُنْ تَعْلَمُ { من خبر الأولين
والآخرين

Quran (4:113)

The news of the first to the last ones (were given to you.)

All that has been written on the Lawh-al
Mahfooz (the preserved tablet) has been given
to the final messenger.

The prophet did not need the worldly pen to
preserve his knowledge but the knowledge
from the beginning of the creation to the end
of the creation which was already preserved
by the Pen upon the preserved tablet was
only a part of the knowledge of the prophet
due to the fact that the preserved tablet
largely details of the creation while the

prophet was also given the secret knowledge about the creator which even the preserved tablet does not contain.

Was the prophet able to write?

Allah enabled his messenger with the miracle to write with the worldly pen so that his perfection remains untained according to the standard in this world. Below is the most famous hadith on the subject.

Here we will discuss the hadith of the pact of
Hudaybiyya between the Muslims and the
dis-believers of Makka.

Sahih Bukhari

Kitab us-Sulhi

Hadith #2698

Hadith #2699

Sahih Muslim

Kitab ul Jihaad wal Siyar

Chapter Baab sulhi al-hudaybiyati fil

hudaybiyati

Hadith # 90

Hadith # 91

Hadith # 92

The narration below is from sahih al-Bukhari.

فَلَمَّا كَتَبُوا الْكِتَابَ كَتَبُوا هَذَا مَا قَاضَى عَلَيْهِ
مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ.
فَقَالُوا لَا نُقِرُّ بِهَا، فَلَوْ نَعْلَمُ أَنَّكَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ مَا
مَنْعَنَاكَ، لَكِنْ أَنْتَ مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ. قَالَ "

أَنَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَأَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ . ثُمَّ
قَالَ لِعَلِيٍّ " امْحُ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ . قَالَ لَا ، وَاللَّهِ لَا
أَمْحُوكَ أَبَدًا ، فَأَخَذَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ
وَسَلَّمَ الْكِتَابَ ، فَكَتَبَ هَذَا مَا قَاضَى عَلَيْهِ
مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ ،

*When (the pact between the muslims and the makkans
was written) they wrote this is what has been decided
Muhammad the messenger of Allah. They said (dis-
believers) we will not read as is for if we knew that he
was the messenger of Allah we would not have stopped
you but you are Muhammad the son of Abdullah. He (the
prophet) said,' I am the messenger of Allah and I am
Muhammad the son of Abdullah.' Then he said to Ali,'
erase the messenger of Allah!' Ali said,' By Allah I will*

*not erase you (your written appellation) ever! The
meseenger of Allah took the scribe and he wrote: this is
what has been decided by Muhammad the son of
Abdullah.*

Imam Muslim narrates:

فَأَمَرَ عَلِيًّا أَنْ يَمْحَاهَا فَقَالَ عَلِيٌّ لَا وَاللَّهِ لَا
أَمْحَاهَا . فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ
وَسَلَّمَ " أَرِنِي مَكَانَهَا " . فَأَرَاهُ مَكَانَهَا فَمَحَاهَا
وَكَتَبَ " ابْنُ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ "

*The prophet ordered Ali to erase it so Ali said, 'by Allah I
will not erase it!' So the messenger of Allah said, ' show
me the place.' Ali showed him (the place where the*

statement: Muhammad the messenger of Allah) was written and the messenger erased it and wrote “son of Abdullah”.

Out of the several narrations that is available only in 1 narration of Imam Muslim it is mentioned that the prophet said to Sayyiduna Ali to show him the place where the statement is written which he wanted to erase.

The impact of this statement is that the prophet did not know the Arabic alphabets

thus he could not read any written statements for if he could then he would have read it himself and there wasn't a need to show him that statement.

Answer 1. To assume that the prophet did not know the arabic alphabets is against the message of the Quran. In the Quran are verses which are solely detached alphabets.

These are called huruuf al-muqatte-aat. How is it possible that the detached alphabets are

part of the Quran and the prophet does not recognise their written form?

Answer 2: Allah says in the Quran....

Quran 55: 1-2.

الرَّحْمَنُ
عَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ

The Most Merciful

Taught the Quran

Allah himself taught the Quran to the prophet. It must be understood that Allah taught him the verses and the muqatte-aat

otherwise how can Allah say that HE taught the Quran yet he did not teach the prophet the Muqatte-aat.

In both the narrations of bukhari there is no mention of the prophet asking Ali to show the place of the statement to be erased.

Hadith # 2698 Sahih Bukhari

The messenger erased the statement with his hands

Hadith # 2699

The messenger took the script and he wrote.

It means the prophet erased the statement
and wrote the new one.

Hadith #90 Sahih Muslim

The prophet erased it with his hands

Hadith #91 Sahih Muslim

Same as hadith # 90

Hadith # 92 Sahih Muslim

Ali showed him the statement, the messenger
erased it and wrote (the new statement).

Even according to hadith 92 the messenger wrote himself the new statement. If he did not know the alphabets so that Ali had to show him then how is it possible that the prophet wrote the new statement.

Both bukhari and muslim agree that the messenger wrote the new statement so it is clear that the messenger knew the alphabets and he could write it. The narration of muslim which mentions that Ali showed him is not logical from an argumentative point of view.

The narration would make sense only if Ali showed the messenger the statement so that the messenger erased it and after that Ali himself wrote the new statement but none of the hadith says or suggests that Ali wrote the new statement.

“Ummi” Prophet- a teacher who does not have a human teacher.

Allah and his messenger know best

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